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Ethanol Emergencies

Ethanol, or ethyl alcohol, is a colorless, flammable liquid with a strong chemical odor. It is used as a motor fuel or fuel additive but is also used as a solvent and an antiseptic. It is transported from biorefineries on train cars, tanker trucks on highways, and ships.

Each step of ethanol production and transport has the potential for accidents: ethanol plant explosions; spills or fires caused by train derailments; and corn mash spills. In 2004, a tanker ship exploded and sank off the coast of Virginia, killing 27 crew members.

Many factors make fighting an ethanol fire challenging. Ethanol is water soluble so using foam as an extinguishing agent is recommended. At 5 parts water to 1 part ethanol, it will still burn. Ethanol vapor also ignites more quickly than gasoline vapor. Using water on an ethanol fire can actually grow the fire. In addition, once the gasoline burns out of a blended ethanol fuel, the flame can be nearly invisible.

The Renewable Fuels Association is hosting an Ethanol Emergency Response "Train the Trainer" webinar (PDF, 310 Kb) on Thursday, February 26th from 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. Eastern. Registration is required for those interested in participating.

Several organizations have resources available for ethanol emergency response. The International Association of Fire Chiefs published "Ethanol Fixed Facilities: Assessment and Guide" (PDF, 2.4 Mb) and "Responding to Ethanol Incidents" (PDF, 7.4 Mb). The Ethanol Emergency Response Coalition has a Training Guide to Ethanol Emergency Response, a multi-module package for first responders. They also have several videos, links to training provided by other organizations and agencies, resources.

(Source: IAFC)

EMS Domestic Preparedness Strategy

Handling of the 2014 Ebola cases in the United States received criticism from the public and media, questioning the ability of hospitals, EMS, and public health departments to manage Ebola cases. Many of the gaps debated during the Ebola response are acknowledged in the "Emergency Medical Services Domestic Preparedness Improvement Strategy" (PDF, 1.38 Mb), which was researched and under development shortly before and during the Ebola incident.

The report pinpoints EMS domestic preparedness gaps while stressing the importance of the EMS system to daily life. It shows how other disciplines (public health, emergen-

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cy management, hospital-based healthcare) are not alternatives for a well-prepared EMS system, and how coordination between disciplines is needed for effective response.

Produced by the National Association of State EMS Officials (NASEMSO), it includes ten goals:

- Establish comprehensive EMS System preparedness capabilities guidelines;
- Develop EMS personnel preparedness core competencies guidelines;
- Determine if the current federal structure optimally promotes, leads, and funds EMS preparedness and response.

The goals also "provide specific guidance and assign responsibilities to EMS organizations at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels of government." Represented communities included EMS officials, EMS physicians, emergency managers, 911 leaders, private-sector ambulance companies, fire chiefs, and federal representatives.

(Source: NASEMSO)

Biodetection Product Guide Now an App

Suspected biological threats, like "white powder" incidents, require precise action and quick testing results. "Biodetection Technologies for First Responders: 2014 Product Guide" provides a summary of commercial technology available. The PDF report has been downloaded over 10,000 times since first being published.

The project is managed by the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, providing unbiased applied evaluations of biodetection technology and products currently available. Agencies looking to purchase such testing kits can use this document to help choose the best option for their needs.

The guide is also now available as a downloadable app from the Apple iTunes store; it is currently unavailable for Android. The new app features embedded videos showing use of some of the technology, access to tutorials, and quick browsing by category. The guide will also soon be available online.

(Source: Pacific Northwest National Laboratory)

Facebook Launches Cyber Collaboration Site

Corporations and government agencies are seeing growing cyberattacks, and in addition to the steps the government is taking to address this issue, the private sector is working to share security threat information. Facebook announced "ThreatExchange" earlier this month, a platform based on its ThreatData analysis framework which will enable participants to search available cyber threat information and post their own.

Industry experts say the value in this isn't in the information that's being shared. This information is already shared manually; the new system makes it available in a structured way, enabling people to access it quickly.

There are many concerns with public-private information sharing on both sides and it is unknown how this new social network for cyber security experts may help government agencies and departments. However, since most agencies and departments use services provided by leading companies involved in this initiative, many will see any benefits the exchange produces.

(Source: IT News)